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## MISCELLANY

### QUESTIONS ANENT MOTHER SETON'S CONVERSION<sup>1</sup>

The scope of this paper is not to tell once more the events which led to, and culminated in, Mrs. E. A. Seton's conversion. Her historians, availing themselves of her own *Diary* and Correspondence, and of notes jotted down by her at various times, have done full justice to the subject. But their uniform statements as to the date at which she was received into the Church imply an *impossibility* which must be removed; and their several accounts of her reception are usually worded in terms so vague, or so guarded as to whet, rather than satisfy, the legitimate curiosity of the reader. Our present purpose extends no further than to an investigation of just what took place on this occasion, and the unraveling of the mix-up of dates in which our historians are entangled.

#### I

First, the question of chronology.

Says Dr. C. I. White:<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Seton applied to be admitted into the "one fold under one shepherd." For this purpose, on the 14th of March, Ash-Wednesday, she went to St. Peter's church . . . After the service, Mrs. Seton made a formal abjuration of Protestantism, and profession of the Catholic faith. Mrs. de Barberey writes in like manner:<sup>3</sup>

Le mercredi des Cendres 14 mars, Elizabeth se rendit à l'église . . . L'office terminé, Elizabeth abjura formellement le protestantisme . . . Such also is the language of Miss Agnes Sadler:<sup>4</sup>

The day appointed for this (Mrs. Seton's reception into the Church) was the fourteenth of March . . . it was Ash-Wednesday . . . After Mass, she was called to the sacristy, and there made a formal abjuration.

Rev. B. Randolph, C.M., in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, repeats the same statement:<sup>5</sup>

The result was that on Ash-Wednesday, 14 March, 1805, she was received into the Church.

In the universal harmony there is, it must be confessed, a seemingly dissonant voice—besides Sister M. A. McCann's, which need not be listened to, as her assertion is evidently erroneous—and this voice is that of Mrs. Seton herself in a letter written April 2, 1805, to Father Cheverus:<sup>7</sup>

. . . my soul has offered all its hesitations & reluctancies a sacrifice with the blessed Sacrifice of the Altar on the 14th March & the next day was admitted to the true ch: of Jesus Christ . . .

<sup>1</sup> The writer—he should perhaps rather style himself compiler—wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mother Margaret, Visitatrix of the Daughters of Charity and appreciating custodian of Mother Seton's precious manuscripts, to Rev. B. Randolph, C.M., of Germantown, Pa., and to Mr. Thomas F. Meehan of the staff of *America*. To the information readily and bountifully supplied by them is due whatever good is in this paper. Heartfelt thanks to them. The undersigned alone, of course, remains responsible for his conclusions.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life of Mrs. E. A. Seton*. New York: Kenedy, 1904 (10th edition), p. 152. All references to Dr. White's work are to this edition.

<sup>3</sup> *Elizabeth Seton et les Commencements de l'Eglise Catholique aux Etats-Unis*. Paris: Poussielgue, 1906 (6th edition), Vol. i, pp. 316-317.

<sup>4</sup> *Elizabeth Seton. Her Life and Work*. Philadelphia: H. L. Kilner & Co. (4th edition), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Art. Seton, Elizabeth Ann*, Vol. xiii, p. 739.

<sup>6</sup> *The History of Mother Seton's Daughters*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., Vol. i, p. 6: "She made her submission to the Catholic Church, at the hands of Rev. Father O'Brien in old St. Peter's Church, Barclay St., March 25, 1805." March 25, 1805, was the day of Mrs. Seton's first Communion; no doubt can be raised on this point.

<sup>7</sup> See WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 156. The text here given is the accurate transcript of the original manuscript of this letter. There is about this sentence a textual difficulty which shall be discussed hereafter (Cf. MRS. SETON, *Memoirs*, etc., Vol. i, p. 218).

This, however, is not the worst difficulty. The main difficulty, indeed, resides in the fact that *March 14, 1805, was not Ash Wednesday*. Every one acquainted with the ecclesiastical calendar knows that Ash Wednesday can never be later than March 10, as April 25 is the extreme possible date of Easter. As a matter of fact, in 1805,<sup>8</sup> Ash Wednesday fell on February 27, Easter being that year on April 14. The 14th of March was, therefore, the Thursday after the second Sunday in Lent.

Still, we should not decry superciliously the lack of acumen of our historians. No doubt but that such of them as entered the field at the ninth or the eleventh hour followed in the footprints of those who went before; but these had given their authority, and, to make the confusion worse confounded, this authority was no other than Mrs. Seton herself, who *ought to have known*. The page of Mrs. Seton to which they appealed is from her *Journal to Amabilia Filicchi*. On account of its importance, we must cite here this page, reproducing as exactly as can be done in print the text written by Mrs. Seton's own hand and preserved in the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity at Emmitsburg, Md.; italicizing the words underlined in the manuscript, paragraphing and punctuating carefully as it does, and marking scupulously the pen strokes or lines which now and then separate words or sentences.<sup>9</sup>

*March 14th 1805.*

A day of days for me Amabilia I have been—where—to the Church of St. Peter with a cross on the top instead of a weathercock——(that is mischievous) but I mean I have been to what is called here among so many churches the *Catholic church*——

When I turned the corner of the street it is in, here my God I go said I, *heart all to you*—entering it, how that heart died away as it were in silence before the little tabernacle and the great crucifixion over it——ah my God here let me rest said I—and down the head on the bosom and the knees on the bench—if I could have thought of any thing but God there was enough I suppose to have astonished a stranger by the hurrying over one another of this off-scound congregation, but as I came only to visit *His Majesty* I knew not what it meant till afterwards—that it was a day they receive Ashes the beginning of Lent and the drole but most venerable irish priest who seems just come there talked of Death so familiarly that he delighted and revived me.——after all were gone I was called to the little room next the altar and there professed to believe what the *council of trent* believes and teaches, laughing with my heart to my Saviour, who saw that I knew not what the council of trent believed, only that it believed what the church of God declared to be its belief, and consequently is now *my belief* for as to going a walking any more about what all the different people believe, I cannot, being quite tired out. and I came up light at heart and cool of head the first time these many long months, but not without begging our Lord to wrap my heart deep in that opened side so well described in the beautiful crucifixion, or lock it up in his little tabernacle where I shall now rest forever——Oh Amabilia the endearments of this day with the children and the play of the heart with God while keeping up their little farces with them—Anna suspects—I anticipate her delight when I take her next Sunday——

———So delighted now to prepare for this good confession which bad as I am I would be ready to make on the house top to insure the good *absolution* I hope for after it—and then to set out a new life—a new existence itself.

no great difficulty for me to be ready for it for truly my life has been well called over in bitterness of soul these months of sorrow past.

<sup>8</sup> See *Ordo Perpetuus Divini Officii juxta Ritum Breviarii ac Missalis S. Romanæ Ecclesiæ*, by a Benedictine of the Cong. of St. Maur, Dijon, 1759. The Tables of this *Ordo* cover the years 1758–1900. The initiated will find easily in the *Tabula Paschalis Nova Reformata* of any modern Breviary the date of the principal liturgical feasts of 1805, if they advert to the fact that, for that year, the *Numerus Aureus* is 1, the *Epacta* \*, and the *Littera Dominicalis* F.

<sup>9</sup> A collation of the text herein given with that printed in M<sup>rs</sup>. R. SETON'S *Memoirs*, Vol. i, pp. 213–215, will reveal that the editor of the *Memoirs* took now and then liberties with the original. This ought to warn us that his transcripts bear watching.

———It is done———easy enough—the kindest most respectable confessor is this Mr. O— with the compassion and yet firmness in this work of mercy which I wd. have expected from our Lord himself—our Lord himself I saw alone in him, both in his and my part of this venerable Sacrament—for oh Amabilia—how awful those words of unloosing, after a 30 years bondage—I felt as if my chains fell, as those of St. Peter at the touch of the divine messenger

My God what new scenes for my soul———

ANNUNCIATION day I shall be made one with him who said unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you can have no part with me———I count the days and hours—yet a few more of hope and expectation and then———how bright the sun these morning walks of preparation———deep snow, or smooth ice, all to me the same I see nothing but the little bright cross on St. Peter's steeple—the children are wild with their pleasure of going with me in their turn.

Does not Mrs. Seton, in that page dated March 14, 1805, and undoubtedly written under the overpowering impressions of that "day of days for her," clearly identify that 14th of March with the "day they receive Ashes, the beginning of Lent"? And if there were any doubts, we need but turn to that Note-book of hers, where, under the caption, *Dear Remembrances*, she wrote, according to Msgr. Seton's transcript:<sup>10</sup>

The thousand prayers, and tears, and cries from the uncertain soul which now succeeded until Ash Wednesday, 14th March, 1805, it entered the Ark of St. Peter with its beloved ones. Now the crowding remembrances, from that day to the 25th, of a first communion in the church of God.

"Ash Wednesday, 14th March, 1805": can there be anything more explicit? Yet the calendar's stony rigidity cannot yield; with mathematical-like obstinacy it points to February 27 as Ash Wednesday. Futile would it be to think our reckonings possibly at fault, owing to a change in the calendar; the Gregorian reform was adopted in England by an Act of Parliament in 1751, and became soon after applicable to the Colonies. Was then Mrs. Seton mistaken, or could anything take place in St. Peter's Church that Thursday morning, March 14, which she took for the ceremony of the Ashes?

Let us endeavor to untie, not to cut, this chronological gordian knot.

To begin with, no doubt that Mrs. Seton went to St. Peter's Church on Barclay Street, on March 14, 1805. There can scarcely be any question either as to her being received on that day in the Catholic Church. Of this proofs are in abundance. Besides her *Journal* to Amabilia Filicchi, there is the above-cited entry in her Note-book, written years after, which, no matter what may be thought of the identification of Ash Wednesday with the 14th of March, states explicitly that "14th March, it (her soul) entered the Ark of St. Peter;" there is likewise the inscription written on the copy of the *Following of Christ* which she gave to Antonio Filicchi: "Antonio Filicchi, from his dear Sister and friend, Eliza A. Seton, to commemorate the happy day he presented her to the Church of God, the 14th March, 1805;"<sup>11</sup> there is finally—for we must limit ourselves, but this last evidence speaks volumes—the singular devotion with which she ever kept the anniversary of that 14th of March. Of the most vivid and grateful remembrance she always treasured of that day, suffice here this one token, when in June, 1817, "preparing for death," she went over her papers and destroyed many of them, on fingering once more her *Journal* of 1805, she could not help jotting down these burning words:

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Thus White, *op. cit.*, p. 153, note. Sister M. A. McCann cites this inscription in another form: "A memorial of his success in her soul's affairs." We cannot help looking with distrust at these quotation marks, and are afraid the form given to the inscription was dictated by the singular opinion of the author about the day of Mrs. Seton's reception into the Church.

Oh! that March 14, 1805!

And I came up light at heart and cool of head the first time those many long months, but not without begging our Lord to wrap my heart deep in that opened side so well described in the beautiful crucifixion, or lock it up in His little tabernacle where I shall now rest forever.

"That March 14" was, with March 25, anniversary of her first communion, a date engraved in her heart in letters of fiery gold and treasured likewise by all those who lived in close intimacy with her. No wonder, therefore, that Father Bruté, to whom the sacred trust of examining Mother Seton's papers had been committed, noted (September, 1829) on some of the documents belonging to this momentous period of her life: "A most precious account of her entering the Church 14th March, 1805 . . . Keep this sacredly for use in *tempore opportuno*."

No doubt, then March 14, 1805, was the day on which Mrs. Seton was received in the Catholic Church. True it is that, in her letter of April 2 to Father Cheverus, she seems to intimate that her reception took place only March 15;<sup>12</sup> but whatever she may mean by this belongs to the discussion of what exactly took place in these two days, March 14 and 15; at any rate, the same context puts into particular prominence March 14 as the day in which "her soul offered all its hesitations and reluctancies a sacrifice with the blessed Sacrifice on the Altar;" and this is enough for the present argumentation.

Now who is the priest who, on the first coming to church of a Protestant telling him he or she has made up his or her mind to become a Catholic, will forthwith proceed to receive the abjuration and profession of faith of that person? Even in the absence of the most elementary rules of theology and the explicit directions of the Ritual, should not common sense dictate that he scrutinize the dispositions of this pretended convert? Has he not investigate whether baptism was ever received, and, in case it was, to inquire where, from whom, and what may be the value of that baptism, in order that he may determine whether a new (absolute or conditional) administration of the sacrament is not advisable? True, Mrs. Seton was not entirely unknown to Father William O'Brien, of St. Peter's Church; during the summer of 1804, Antonio Filicchi had in her interest gone to consult the worthy Dominican and shown him the paper wherein Mr. Hobart, the Episcopalian Rector of Trinity Church, had set forth the claims of his Church against Catholicism; and Father O'Brien had advised her reading *England's Conversion and Reformation*,<sup>13</sup> and had soon after replied to the Hobart manuscript.<sup>14</sup> In January 1805, Mrs. Seton herself had "tried so many ways to see Dr. O'Brien,"<sup>15</sup> but for reasons independent of the will of both, the interview did not take place.<sup>16</sup> Thus frustrated in her efforts to find at home the guidance she so sorely needed amidst the darkness wherein she was plunged, she resolved to appeal to the charity and zeal of Father Cheverus,<sup>17</sup> of whom she had heard from Antonio Filicchi, then at Boston. Let us take it for

<sup>12</sup> "My soul offered . . . on the 14th March & the next day was admitted to the true ch: of Jesus Christ."

<sup>13</sup> WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 113; DE BARBEREY, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 257; SADLIER, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 117; SADLIER, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>15</sup> MSGR. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 210.

<sup>16</sup> WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 148; DE BARBEREY, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 310; SADLIER, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>17</sup> WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 149; DE BARBEREY, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 310; SADLIER, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-68; the answer of Father Cheverus is printed pp. 67-68; it was first published in the *Life of Mother Elizabeth Boyle*, Staten Island, N. Y., 1890, pp. 27-28. After citing this letter, Miss Sadlier writes: "Shortly after the receipt of this letter, Elizabeth received one from Antonio Filicchi, which had been written to him in regard to her by Bishop Carroll." This statement appears to be incorrect. Bishop Carroll's letter referred to is clearly, judging from the gist of it given by the author of *Elizabeth Seton*, p. 68, the same as may be read in WHITE, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-151, and MSGR. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, pp. 205-208, and dated January 13, 1805. Cheverus' letter was written March 4, and sent through Filicchi, because of the writer's ignorance of Mrs. Seton's address. In these conditions, that good Antonio actually communicated Cheverus' letter before Carroll's, as Miss A. Sadlier affirms, is so unnatural that the statement cannot be admitted without good documentary evidence.

granted, moreover, that Father William O'Brien mentioned to his brother and fellow-worker at St. Peter's something about the prospective convert. All this notwithstanding, how can Father Mathew O'Brien be exculpated from the accusation of undue haste and rash disregard of the Ritual's implied injunction "to see to it that the postulant is exactly instructed in the Catholic faith and morals, to train him for some days in works of piety, to make sure that he perseveres in his purpose, to inquire diligently in what state and condition he is, particularly in regard to baptism previously received?"<sup>18</sup> Most hasty, too hasty, indeed, was certainly Father Mathew O'Brien if, as is asserted by all Mrs. Seton's historians, *the first time she went to St. Peter's Church*, on March 14, he at once received her abjuration and profession of faith.

Stranger still. Note, if you please, her reflection on her first visit to St. Peter's, touching "the drole, but most venerable Irish priest, who seems just come there;" he impresses her as if she has never seen him before, and, indeed, she cannot have seen him, since it is the first time she has come. Yet it was evidently by special appointment she went to the sacristy after the service: "After all were gone, *I was called to the little room next the altar.*" Who then arranged for this appointment? No doubt, Antonio Filicchi, it will be said. If he did it just that very morning, Father O'Brien's haste was, as remarked above, inexplicable; if Filicchi had, on Mrs. Seton's behalf, made the necessary arrangements previously, is it not passing strange that everything, up to the supreme step of the convert's abjuration, was thus transacted by proxy?

On every side, improbabilities confront us. Of course, *Le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable*; but to the unlikely history is loath to extend the right hand of friendship; only when it presents itself with proper high-class recommendations does she let it into the house.

Is the well-nigh incredible assertion implied in the narrative of our historians, to wit: that Mrs. Seton went to St. Peter's for the first time the day of her abjuration, March 14, sufficiently vouched for? Emphatically no. For Mrs. Seton herself asserts, and every one who has written on the subject repeats her assertion with perfect material correctness, that she went to St. Peter's for the first time on Ash Wednesday. The *Journal* to Amabilia Filicchi can indeed leave no doubt: "It was a day they receive the Ashes the beginning of Lent;" and the passage of her *Dear Remembrances* is in its own terse way quite as explicit: "The thousand prayers, and tears, and cries from the uncertain soul which now succeeded until Ash-Wednesday . . ." Only be it remembered that to say Ash Wednesday, 1805, is tantamount to saying February 27. On Ash Wednesday, February 27, therefore, should the first visit of Mrs. Seton to St. Peter's be dated.

This admitted, everything in this momentous period of her history succeeds in good order, the gordian knot of the impossible chronology hitherto blindly accepted is unloosed, and the otherwise inconceivable conduct of Father O'Brien proven to be according to the dictates of prudence and the rules of pastoral theology.

But what of the *Journal* of Mrs. Seton? What of her *Dear Remembrances*? Are not the texts absolutely incompatible with the view here advocated? On March 14, 1805, Mrs. Seton notes down her visit to the church of St. Peter; she was surprised, and had she not been so engrossed in her own thoughts, she would have been distracted by "the hurrying over one another" of the congregation going to receive the Ashes; she was, at first, a little startled, too, by the appearance of the priest, but

<sup>18</sup> Although the Ritual (Tit. II, Cap. 3) speaks all along of the *Baptizandi*, the rules laid down apply even when the convert is not to be baptized (Nos. 14 and 16). The question whether Mrs. Seton was actually baptized or not is in no way prejudicated.

soon "delighted and revived" by his speech; and after all were gone, she was called "to the little room next the altar," and there made her profession of faith. All things to the contrary notwithstanding, it was "Ash-Wednesday, 14 March, 1805," as she notes in her *Dear Remembrances*. Texts are texts; and Mrs. Seton ought to have known. Thus the objection, and we hope we have not minimized it.

Yes, Mrs. Seton ought to have known; and precisely because she did know, she could not say that March 14, the day she was received in the Church, was Ash-Wednesday, any more than I can say that today, Thursday, May 1st of the year of grace, 1919, is Easter Sunday. I go farther and add, precisely because she did know, what she did say *must mean something else*.

Was she not possibly in error, and may not something have taken place in the church on that Thursday morning, March 14, which she mistook for the ceremony of the Ashes? Mistaken a neophyte might well be, indeed, about some non-essential though time-honored rite. But she was not mistaken: "she knew not" then what that hurrying of the congregation meant. She knew it, though, when she penned her account of it; she had learned it in the meantime. When? When she went to the sacristy after the service? Possibly; although we may well suppose she had, on this her first visit to St. Peter's, more pressing thoughts to engross her mind than that of this little disorder. Much more probably, however, the explanation came some time between Ash-Wednesday and March 14. But this is re-asserting on the force of a new argument the affirmation that she first went to the church on Ash-Wednesday, February 27; it is not explaining directly the puzzling page of her *Journal*.

This page has an interesting history which cannot be deemed here irrelevant. The only printed English text of that part of Mrs. Seton's *Journal*, which extends from the 14th to the 25th of March, 1805, is in the *Memoirs* published by her grandson, Msgr. Seton.<sup>19</sup> He, no doubt, transcribed it from the manuscript preserved in the Archives of St. Joseph's, Emmitsburg. A mere glance, however, at the faithful copy given above will easily convince the most indulgent reader that the editor of the *Memoirs* took liberties with the original. His alterations—mostly suppressions—prompted, no doubt, by excellent reasons, bear, it must be owned, upon unessential words and clauses; still the very fact that he made alterations inspires a certain distrust and warrants caution in the use of his transcripts. We need not follow him here, at any rate, since we have an authentic copy of Mrs. Seton's manuscript.

This manuscript itself, though written by Mrs. Seton's own hand, is not, however, the original of the *Journal*. The original was sent to Amabilia Filicchi and, together with the letters to Antonio, is kept as a precious relic by the Filicchi family.<sup>20</sup> Of these papers a copy by Patrizio Filicchi was by him presented to Mrs. de Barberey when she was preparing her work; and there is every reason to believe that copy, work of love and religious veneration, is correct in every way. Now judging from Mrs. de Barberey's excerpts, there were, between the original sent to Leghorn and the copy kept by Mrs. Seton, slight differences, consisting principally in dates given in the one and omitted in the other. In the Emmitsburg manuscript the whole passage given above contains only one date, March 14, 1805, but the blanks interspersed here and there obviously separate the various entries. The Leghorn manuscript fills

<sup>19</sup> WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 152, weaves into his narrative phrases of the entry of March 14, but does not cite it at length; he reproduces, though (pp. 153-155), the text from the words: "So delighted now to prepare for this good confession," to the end of the entry of March 25.

<sup>20</sup> DE BARBEREY, Vol. i, p. 13: "M. Patrizio Filicchi, le fils aîné du noble Antonio, conserve comme un trésor les lettres que son père avait reçues d'elle (Mrs. Seton). C'est tout un volume manuscrit." The volume must have naturally contained also the letters to Amabilia, Antonio's wife and Patrizio's mother.

the blanks, dating the several entries. Thus, before the paragraph: "So delighted now to prepare . . .," we find the date, March 16, 1805; the next entry: "It is done—easy enough . . ." belongs to March 20; the rest of the passage cited above is marked March 22; and it is followed by a long one, bearing the date March 25, containing the outpourings of Mrs. Seton's fervor after her first communion.

Only the first portion, that written on March 14, must presently detain our attention. Even material details here have a value and must be carefully pondered over. That entry of the 14th of March is made up of three different paragraphs. After the general statement brimming over with intense emotion: "A day of days for me, Amabilia," the writer notes she has gone to the Catholic church of New York. This in itself, though still vague, must be—and she knew it—to her friend a foretaste of most happy news. Not long since, late in December, 1804, Mrs. Seton had recorded a desperate visit to St. George's (Protestant) Church; and even though she noted then that she, that day, left the house a Protestant, but returned to it a Catholic, or, at any rate, determined to go no more to the Protestants,<sup>21</sup> and still, a few weeks later (February 15), seemed resolved to "go peaceably and firmly to the Catholic Church," yet in her letter (February 19) to Father Cheverus, so far as we can surmise from his answer, she confessed "her conscience whispers sometimes that she is too partial to the catholic side" and is not free from doubts and anxieties. The news of her going to St. Peter's, then, was tantamount to the announcement that all hesitations were at last put an end to. Mark, however, that she does not say that this "day of days" is the first time she has gone to St. Peter's.

The second paragraph depicts vividly her impressions of her *first* visit to the church "which has a cross on the top instead of a weathercock." It happened on Ash Wednesday, as she has learned since. Why, it will be asked, does she not specify: "When (on going there February 27 last) I turned to the corner of the street it is in . . ."? We offer no other explanation but that she is writing under an overpowering emotion; at all events, Amabilia will easily make out that, as that first visit, which Mrs. Seton now describes, took place on Ash-Wednesday, evidently she is not speaking of what has just happened on the day she writes, March 14.

What has just taken place on that "day of days," she now goes on to tell in the last paragraph: "After all had departed . . ." Here again we should like to find a few words making the meaning perfectly clear, something like: "This morning, after all had departed . . ." But insisting upon this paragraph is useless, Mrs. Seton herself, as has been seen above, and all her historians after her, dating her reception into the Catholic Church on that day.

In short, this entry of March 14 could be summed up in the following words: "Amabilia, I am now a Catholic: I first went to St. Peter's on Ash-Wednesday, and today have just been received in the Church."

Neither is, despite first appearances, the passage of Mrs. Seton's *Dear Remembrances* leastwise in opposition to the conclusions advocated above, once its text is accurately established as Mrs. Seton jotted it down, and a few obvious remarks are borne in mind. Mrs. de Barberey, who has left out one of the crucial words and made a little change at the end of the clause, renders the passage as follows:<sup>22</sup>

. . . qui se succédèrent jusqu'au mercredi 14 mars 1805, jour où j'entrai dans l'arche du Seigneur . . .

<sup>21</sup> MSGR. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 214; WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 147; DE BARBEREY, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 298. Msgr. Seton seems to date this passage January, 1805; White gives it after a fragment of a letter rightly dated November, 1804. Mrs. de Barberey's dating, December 19, 1804, is undoubtedly correct: in September, Mrs. Seton, prevailed upon by her desire for peace and by "persuasion about properties, &c.," had gone to St. Paul's; in the first days of January, she had taken "the desperate resolution to remain till the moment of death of no religion at all" (*Journal*, probably written in 1815); her visit to St. George's must come before this "desperate resolution."

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.* Vol. ii, p. 454.



Here is exactly the text as found in the original of this note, preserved in the Archives of St. Joseph's, Emmitsburg:

. . . the thousand tears of prayers and cries from the uncertain soul which now succeeded, until Ash Wednesday 14th March 1805 it entered the Ark of St. Peter with its beloved ones.

Mrs. de Barberey's departure from this text, slight as it is, is surprising, for usually she abides scrupulously by the original sources. A collation with the transcript of Msgr. Seton, as reproduced faithfully in the beginning of this paper, reveals that the good prelate, too, prevaricated. Waiving his unwarranted change of the "tears of prayers," we have, however, no grievous fault to find with his trying to introduce modern punctuation in these lines; for publishing his documents not with a view to cater to historians, but rather for edification, his solicitude to make his text intelligible to a modern reader was praiseworthy; every one acquainted with century old documents, especially letters and memorandums like the present, is fully conversant with the economy of punctuation marks practised in those days. The point, then, is: Did the editor, in introducing *his* punctuation marks, enter exactly into the meaning of his grandmother's text? No; since she could not possibly have any idea of identifying Ash-Wednesday, 1805, with the 14th of March. What she meant, then, was to mark the whole course of her entrance in the Church, *from* Ash-Wednesday, when she took the first definite step to that effect by going to St. Peter's, *to* March 14, when she was received. We would, therefore, suggest the following typographical arrangement, instead of that of Msgr. Seton, as expressing more accurately this meaning:

. . . which now succeeded, until (Ash-Wednesday—14th March, 1805)  
it entered . . .

## II

Vexing as is the chronological puzzle which the foregoing pages have attempted to solve, it is not more so than the problem of what exactly took place on March 14 at St. Peter's when Mrs. Seton was received into the Catholic Church. That she made abjuration of Protestantism and profession of the Catholic faith goes without saying; the Roman Ritual enjoins this previous "confession and detestation of the perverseness of their errors" upon all heretics who enter the Catholic fold, whether their baptism was valid or not. As a matter of fact, our often quoted *Journal* is most explicit on this point. The whole question, then, in the present instance, is reduced to the simple query: Was Mrs. Seton baptized in the Catholic Church?

Dr. White entertained little doubt that baptism must have intervened; for, citing (p. 156) Mrs. Seton's letter to Father Cheverus, upon the words: "My soul has offered all its hesitations and reluctances a sacrifice with the blessed sacrifice on the altar, on the 14th of March, and the next day was admitted to the true Church of Christ," he comments in a footnote: "By admission to the true Church, Mrs. Seton probably means that she was baptized conditionally and approached the sacrament of penance."<sup>23</sup> Before Dr. White, the author of a *Sketch of Mother Seton* printed in the Catholic Directory or Clergy List of 1842, had already committed himself to the statement that the subject of the sketch was baptized in St. Peter's in 1805, adding, moreover, that she then took the name Mary—an erroneous assertion, as Mrs. Seton received that name at confirmation, on May 26, 1806.<sup>24</sup> More modern historians of Elizabeth Ann Seton, however, word very guardedly their narratives of her recep-

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>24</sup> WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 176; MSGR. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 248; DE BARBEREY, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 377. There is, in regard to this date, a slight difficulty arising from the text of a letter to Antonio Filicchi as given by Mrs. de Barberey; there must be here a misprint or a mistranslation: May 26, 1806, was Pentecost Monday.

tion into the Church; and none of them makes the least reference to baptism. Had they doubts, or did they simply take the matter for granted?

*Ad jus quod attinet*, as canonists say, the discipline then in vigor in the American Church was that codified at the Synod held in Baltimore in 1791.<sup>25</sup>

As nothing in religion is more holy and precious than the Sacraments, every possible care must be taken in regard to their right administration and their worthy reception. Beginning, therefore, with Baptism, which ushers men into the Christian Society, considering that in this country we live amidst a number of heretical sects which either do not administer Baptism at all, or administer it only to adults, or, denying its necessity for salvation, are very remiss in its administration; we ordain:

1. That conditional Baptism be conferred on those of the reality of whose Baptism moral certitude, after diligent inquiry, cannot be obtained; also that infants, baptized in danger of death by heretical or even Catholic midwives, be likewise baptized conditionally, unless the Catholic midwives are such that no prudent doubt can be entertained as to the validity of the baptism conferred by them. However, the pastors should keep carefully from re-baptizing indiscriminately, without making any inquiries, those who are not baptized by a priest; lest they incur the irregularity enacted by Pope Alexander III against those who repeat Baptism.

2. We ordain that the Pastors, inasmuch as lies in their power, write down in the Register kept for that purpose, the names and age of all baptized persons, also the names of the parents and of the sponsors.

3. When adult heretics validly baptized are converted to the faith, it is not necessary to supply the ceremonies omitted in their Baptism.

In the present instance, we may well take it for granted that, according to the axiom of law, "everything was actually done that should have been done:" the undoubted earnestness of the convert, the well-known learning, virtue and sterling priestly character of the pastor of St. Peter's, the interest taken in the affair by men of the stamp of Father Cheverus and Bishop Carroll, not to mention Antonio Filicchi, fully warrant the assumption.

The facts, now. Elizabeth Ann Bayley was born in New York, the 28th of August, 1774. The Bayleys attending Trinity (Protestant Episcopal) Church, it is quite natural to suppose she was baptized there. No record of the event, however, is extant, for the Baptismal Register perished in the fire which destroyed Trinity Church on September 21, 1776. Owing to the child's grandfather, Richard Charlton, being since 1747 rector of St. Andrew's Church, Richmond, Staten Island,<sup>26</sup> the baptism might possibly have been reserved to the venerable clergyman; accordingly a search was made in the baptismal records of that church, but it proved fruitless.

Lamentable though it is, the lack of documentary evidence of Elizabeth's baptism does not authorize the harbouring of any suspicions as to the actuality of the fact. Only two considerations would be of such a nature as to suggest doubt. In the first place, some Protestant sects, and many Protestant people, consider baptism an unessential ceremony, good in itself, but which may be dispensed with; it is sure that Elizabeth's parents did not share in this belief? The question is all the

<sup>25</sup> *Acta et Decreta Sacrorum Conciliorum Recentiorum Collectio Lacensis*, Tom. iii, pp. 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> The church on Staten Island, of which Mrs. Seton's maternal grandfather was rector, is usually referred to by her historians as "St. Ann's." There was never any church of that name on the island. We have here another evidence of the blind faith with which our historians uncritically copy one another. "St. Andrew's Church was built in 1713 by the Rev. Eneas McKensie, in the administration of Governor Robert Hunter, under a charter of Queen Anne, who presented the Church with prayer-books, pulpit cover and a silver communion service with her name inscribed thereon." *Annals of Staten Island from Its Discovery to the Present Time*, by J. J. Clute. New York, 1877, pp. 262-263. "In 1747 the Rev. Richard Charlton became rector: his eldest daughter was connected by marriage to the Dongan family, and another daughter was the wife of Dr. Richard Bailey, who was Health Officer of the Port of New York and died in 1801; his remains are interred in the graveyard of the church. Dr. Charlton's ministry continued 32 years; he died in 1779 and was buried under the church."—*Ibid.*, p. 264.

more pertinent because Dr. Richard Bayley, Elizabeth's father, is usually described as inclined to what, at the close of the eighteenth century, was called "philosophical ideas." "He does not appear," writes his great-grandson, "to have inculcated any very positive Christianity on his family, for this favored daughter of his once told one of her own children that she never heard him pronounce the name of Jesus Christ until he lay on his death-bed."<sup>27</sup> This is the second consideration possibly capable of casting a doubt upon the fact of Elizabeth's baptism.

These considerations, however, can have no weight here. No matter, indeed, how certain Protestants regard baptism, it is hard to believe, at any rate, their lax opinion was shared in by Elizabeth's mother, the daughter of a clergyman highly esteemed for the conscientious discharge of his duties. On the other hand, great as may have been Dr. Bayley's "philosophical" inclinations, and although it was possibly on his advice that his brilliant daughter, then seventeen or eighteen years of age, read Voltaire and Rousseau, yet he does not appear to be an anti-religious man, or alien to Christian sentiments, who used to carry about in his portfolio a picture of the crucifixion,<sup>28</sup> and who accepted to act as sponsor at the baptism of all his daughter's children born during his lifetime;<sup>29</sup> and if, as historians aver, he exercised a preponderating, nay, even a well-nigh exclusive influence on the education of his daughter, the fruits yielded by that education from Elizabeth's earliest years enable us to judge the educator. Once more let us turn to her *Dear Remembrances*.<sup>30</sup>

At four years of age—sitting alone on a step of the doorway looking at the clouds, while my little sister Catharine, two years old, lay in her coffin; they asked me: did I not cry when little Kitty was dead? No, because Kitty is gone up to heaven. I wish I could go too with mamma.

At six—taking my little sister Emma up to the highest window, and showing her the setting sun, told her God lived up in heaven, and good children would go up there. Teaching her her prayers. My poor mother in law,<sup>31</sup> then in great affliction, taught me the 22nd Psalm: *The Lord is my shepherd, the Lord ruleth me. . . . Though I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me;* and all through life it has been the favourite one.

New Rochelle—Miss Molly B.'s—at eight years of age. . . . Admiration of the clouds. Delight to gaze at them: always with the look for my mother and little Kitty in heaven. . . . Every little leaf, and flower, or insect, animal, shades of clouds, or moving trees, objects of vacant, unconnected thought of God and heaven. Pleasure in learning any thing pious. . .

Twelve years old—Foolish, ignorant, childish heart. Home again at my father's. Pleasure in reading prayers. Love to nurse the children and sing little hymns over their cradle. A night passed in terror, saying all the while, *our Father*.

Fourteen years of age.—At uncle B.'s, New Rochelle, again. The Bible so enjoyed, and Thomson and Milton. Hymns said on the rocks, surrounded with ice, in transports of first pure enthusiasm. Gazings at the stars—Orion. Walk among cedars singing hymns. . . . Joy in God that He was my Father. Insisting that He should not forsake me. My father away, perhaps dead; but God was my Father, and I quite independent of whatever might happen. . . . At home. Methodist spinning girls. Their continual hymn "*And am I only born to die,*" made deep impression.

Here, then, is a child who, at four years of age, has learned—no one will say she has that knowledge by intuition—of heaven as the bright abode of innocence and goodness; who, at six, has been made familiar with the thought of God, knows

<sup>27</sup> MSCR. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> MSCR. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 200; DE BARBEREY, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 269.

<sup>29</sup> See below the records of the baptism of Mrs. Seton's children.

<sup>30</sup> MSCR. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, pp. 148-150; DE BARBEREY, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, pp. 443-446.

<sup>31</sup> A colloquial, now obsolete English expression for stepmother.

her prayers and teaches them to her little sister, appreciates the tender *abandon* of the Psalmist's trust in God; who, some two years later, is naturally reminded of God by every object which meets her gaze, and finds "pleasure in learning anything pious," in reading prayers, in singing hymns as other children sing ditties. . . . Certainly in the atmosphere of the home where that child grew up there was the soft warmth of religion; apparently the "philosophical ideas" of the father were not averse to the worship of the God whom the "philosophers" themselves extolled so often in their books; at the Doctor's side was a woman with a pious turn of mind, seeking comfort in the words of the inspired poet-king, and who cannot be thought of as frowning upon her step-daughter's visible inclination to religion.<sup>32</sup> Neither does it seem that in the home of the Bayleys of New Rochelle Elizabeth breathed a different atmosphere: there it was that she "so enjoyed the Bible," and no reason whatever can be adduced to suppose that she, who was straightforwardness personified,<sup>33</sup> read the Bible by stealth. Whichever side we turn, therefore, we find her in surroundings where religion was in honor and where we cannot detect any laxness in regard to a sacrament which the Catechism of the Episcopal Church considered absolutely essential.

She, indeed, had never any doubts concerning her baptism. Of this her unhesitating conviction we hear an echo in a letter to Amabilia Filicchi, written July 19, 1804, only a few weeks after her return from Italy. Following a few lines on the impressions caused on her by the recent death of her sister-in-law, Rebecca Seton, she remarks:<sup>34</sup> "I had a most affectionate note from Mr. Hobart today, asking me how I could ever think of leaving the Church in which I was baptized." Furthermore, her care about the baptism of her own children is the best evidence of her view regarding this sacrament. The records of Trinity Church, in their official conciseness, tell sufficiently the story.

June 4, 1795. ANNA MARIA,

Born May 3, 1795.

Parents: William Magee and Elizabeth A. Seton.

Sponsors: Richard Bailey, Mary Fitch of Jamaica and Rebecca Seton.<sup>35</sup>

December 24, 1796. WILLIAM,

born November 25, 1796.

Parents: William M. and Elizabeth A. Seton.

Sponsors: Richard Bailey, Joseph Covachichi and Mary Post.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> What Mrs. Seton writes of her stepmother's death, in a letter to Antonio Filicchi, dated September 9, 1805 (*DE BARBERY, op. cit.*, Vol. i, pp. 348-349), is no indication that Mrs. Bayley was not a religious woman. Mrs. Seton simply compares the death of a Catholic surrounded by all the comforts of religion to that of the Protestants "who die without sacraments, without prayers, unaided at their last moment in the struggle of failing nature, deprived of the consolation which Almighty God has so abundantly bestowed upon us." This was no new impression upon her mind. Already in July, 1804, while still a Protestant, at the bedside of her dearest sister-in-law Rebecca Seton, the same thought had forced itself upon her mind, as we see in a letter of hers to Amabilia Filicchi of July 19: "The impressions . . . and the different scenes I passed through in Leghorn are far from being effaced from my mind, which indeed could not help even in the most painful moments of attendance on my beloved sister, making the strong comparison of a sick and dying person in your happy country, where the poor sufferer is soothed and strengthened at once by every help of religion; where the one you call *Father* of your soul attends and watches it in the weakness and trials of parting nature, with the same care you and I watch our little infant's body in its first struggles and wants on its entrance into life. Dearest Rebecca! how many looks of silent distress have we exchanged about this last passage, this breaking of time into eternity!" *MSGR. SETON, op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 195; *DE BARBERY, op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 249. The same vivid impression is given utterance to in a letter to Antonio Filicchi, dated March 14, 1807, at the occasion of the death of Mrs. Maitland (Eliza Seton); whom she had assisted in her last moments: "Oh, how awful! without prayer, without sacrament, without faith! Terrified, impatient, wretched! How shall we ever praise enough that mercy which has placed us in the bosom of our mother!"—*WHITE, op. cit.*, p. 195; *DE BARBERY, op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 391.

<sup>33</sup> In 1793 her father wrote to her: "You will never deceive your father in thought or word."—*MSGR. SETON, op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> *MSGR. SETON, op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 195; *DE BARBERY, op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 249.

<sup>35</sup> Records of Trinity Church Baptisms, Vol. i, p. 327.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342(p).

August 20, 1798. RICHARD BAILEY,  
born July 20, 1798.

Parents: William M. and Elizabeth A. Seton.

Sponsors: Richard Bailey, Joseph Covachichi and Mary Post.<sup>37</sup>

November 19, 1800. CATHERINE CHARLTON,  
born June 28, 1800.

Parents: William M. and Elizabeth A. Seton.

Sponsors: Mary Post, Catherine Duplex, Juliana Scott, Richard Bailey and Richard Curson Jr.<sup>38</sup>

September 29, 1802. REBECCA,  
born August 20, 1802.

Parents: William M. and Elizabeth A. Seton.

Sponsors: William M. Seton and Elizabeth Sadler.<sup>39</sup>

From these records it will be seen that all, Catherine excepted, were baptized within a reasonable time—about one month—after their birth. The exception is interesting, in so far as it reveals Elizabeth's dislike of the delay, a dislike of which she explains clearly the cause and origin in a letter to her friend Julia Scott, who was to be the child's godmother:<sup>40</sup>

As to our sweet babe, I think you would wish to be its nurse as well as godmother . . . Gyles told us you were to be here in a month from the time he left you; but the month is past and no Julia, nor do you intimate that you are coming. How well we might have managed, for you could have personally received your little daughter; but as it is I will defer having her christened until we go to town,<sup>41</sup> though against my inclination, for I think the covenant should be entered into as soon as possible, as it is too sacred to be trusted to accident.

Any person thinking the baptism covenant "too sacred to be trusted to accident" could not have any doubts indeed as to her own baptism. Nor can we.

But what was the value of this baptism? How was it looked upon by the Catholic clergy?

A letter to Bishop Carroll to Antonio Filicchi, dated Baltimore, January 13, 1805, acquaints us sufficiently with the Bishop's view of Mrs. Seton's Episcopalian baptism:<sup>42</sup>

As far as it is in my power to judge of her state of mind, from the account of it contained in your letters, I do not think it advisable for her, at present, to perplex herself with reading any more controversy. She has seen enough on that subject to assure herself of the true principles for settling her faith. Her great business now should be to beseech our Divine Redeemer *to revive in her heart the grace of her baptism*, and to fortify her soul in the resolution of following unreservedly the voice of God speaking in her heart, however difficult and painful the sacrifices may be which it requires.

In Cheverus' letter of March 4 we find no such estimate, even when, after advising her, as the Bishop, that, in her present state of mind, "the reading of all controversial works would be perfectly useless," he adds further below: "It appears to me, that if at times you have doubts, anxieties, you are never for a moment a strong Protestant, although you are often, as you say, a good Catholic, and I believe you are always a good Catholic." Obviously, the eminent writer in these words means

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>40</sup> Msgr. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, pp. 64-65.

<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Seton was then on Staten Island at her father's cottage near the Health Establishment.

<sup>42</sup> WHITE, *op. cit.*, p. 150; Msgr. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, p. 206. Italics ours.

to speak of her convictions, in perfect accordance with the Catholic faith. But, less than a year later, he did not hesitate to commit himself to an explicit statement in regard to the value he attached to the Episcopalian baptism of Cecilia Seton, Elizabeth's sister-in-law. Cecilia, then scarcely fifteen years old, was taken gravely ill during the winter 1805-1806. She begged that Elizabeth, whom she loved most tenderly and whom the Seton family had absolutely "cut off" since her conversion, should be allowed to come to see her. At once Mrs. Seton hurried to her bedside. But what should she do in the present juncture for the salvation, which she had so much at heart, of the dearly beloved child? She was afraid of speaking too much or too little; and once more she turned for light to Boston. Here is on this delicate point the answer of Father Cheverus:<sup>43</sup>

I must first tell you that your conscience ought to be free from scruples about the past, since you have done, in regard to your interesting sister, everything which you thought discretion and prudence would allow. In her present situation is it your duty to go farther? I am at a loss myself how to give an answer to this question. I have for these few days consulted in prayer the Father of lights, I have endeavored to place myself in your situation. Here is the result, which, however, I propose to you with the utmost diffidence.

Neither the obstacles you mention, nor the sickly state of the dear child, permit to instruct her in the points of controversy. What you have told her till now appears to me nearly sufficient. I would recall to her, when opportunity should offer, the amiable and pious wish of living one day in a convent, and there to become a member of the Church. Should she ask any questions, I would answer in few words, without entering into the particular merits of the question, telling her that when she is better you will examine the matter together; that, at present, it is enough to know Jesus and Him crucified, to put all her trust in Him, to suffer with Him, etc., to wish to become a member of His Church. Which Church is His? she will, perhaps, say, Answer: the Catholic, because it is the most ancient. If she asks no questions, I would confine myself to what you have said to her before. It is important that you may continue to visit her. Everything that would put an end to your intercourse with her must be avoided. The most embarrassing circumstance will be when you will see her near the period of the fatal disorder. Then, perhaps, you will be with her oftener and alone. Let the love of our adorable Saviour in His sacrament and on the cross be the subject of your discourse. You might also mention the anointing of the sick in St. James and if she desires it and it can be done, *procure to her the blessing of the last sacraments*. Could they be hard-hearted enough to refuse such a request, and at such a time? The whole weight of their displeasure will fall upon you, but God has given you strength to bear it, and will make rich amends by His interior consolations. It is probable, however, that you will not find an opportunity of accomplishing this. Should it unhappily be the case, you will have nothing to reproach yourself with; for if you attempt to do more than the above, it is almost certain that you will be hindered from doing anything at all.

*Your beloved sister has been made by baptism a member of the Church.* Wilful error, I have reason to think, has never separated her from that Sacred body. Her singular innocence of mind and ardent piety have also, very likely preserved her from offending God in any grievous manner, and I hope, in consequence, that even if she cannot receive the sacraments, she will be a member of the triumphant church in heaven, although it would be to her an unspeakable advantage to receive the sacraments, and would render her salvation more secure.

Mrs. Seton's zeal, prudence and discretion had soon their reward, for one day that the two sisters-in-law were left alone, Cecilia, although realizing perfectly what dire consequences would eventually follow the accomplishment of her resolution, confided to Elizabeth she had made up her mind to become a Catholic. Owing to

<sup>43</sup> WHITE, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-185; MSGR. SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, pp. 240-242. Italics ours.

her condition, the fulfilment of her desire had to be postponed until her complete recovery. But we are not so much interested presently in Cecilia's conversion and the price the beautiful, heroic little soul had to pay for it, as in Cheverus' opinion on the value of her Episcopalian baptism.<sup>44</sup> If he advises Mrs. Seton "with the utmost diffidence" touching the course to follow in her dealings with the sick girl, he uses no such rhetorical precautions about his assertion of Cecilia being "by baptism a member of the Church." Humble Father Cheverus requested Mrs. Seton to communicate his letter to Father Tisserant and to "beg of him to correct anything which should not be perfectly exact." That Father Tisserant endorsed the letter is indirectly proven by the fact that the Baptismal Register is again absolutely silent about the baptism of Cecilia, who, to the great delight of her sister-in-law, was received in the Church on the 20th of June.

One month after the latter event, Annina, Mrs. Seton's eldest daughter, made her first communion. It will be recalled that, on the 14th of March, 1805, Mrs. Seton wrote: "Anna suspects" (her mother's conversion). "I anticipate her delight when I take her next Sunday." Neither Anna, therefore, nor any other of the children had she taken to church with her on the day of her profession of faith. Yet, recalling later the emotions of that "day of days for her," she said her soul "entered the Ark of St. Peter with its beloved ones." If the clergy, indeed, had satisfied themselves of the validity of her baptism, they must be satisfied likewise of that of her children's. No wonder, then, that neither the name of Anna Maria nor those of her two brothers and two sisters are to be found in the Baptismal Register of St. Peter's, and that henceforth we see them accompanying in turns their mother to church, and one after another making their first communion in due time without further ado.

Three years later (1809), at Emmitsburg, the Seton family counted another convert, Harriet, Cecilia's sister.<sup>45</sup> As in the case of the others, no record of her baptism is extant. Here, however, the absence of testimonial cannot be construed into even a presumption that she did not receive conditional baptism; for already, at the time of Father Bruté's rectorship of the parish, no records prior to 1812 were in existence. Neither can the words of Harriet's *Memorandum* be understood of her recent baptism.<sup>46</sup>

September 24th—Day of the Blessed Virgin of Marcy—Received my first Communion. On the same day made a renewal of my baptismal vows.

The renewal here mentioned was a ceremony, probably of French origin, usually taking place on the day of the first communion.

Leaving aside, therefore, this case of Harriet Seton, in view of the injunction of the Synod of Baltimore and of the practice of the priests at the time, of faithfully registering baptisms, both absolute and conditional, and even the supplying of baptismal ceremonies,<sup>47</sup> the fact that no entry is found of the (conditional) baptism of either Mrs. Seton, or her children, or her sister-in-law Cecilia can be assigned no other cause than that none of these converts was even conditionally baptized.

What, then, did Mrs. Seton mean in her letter of April 2, 1805, to Father Che-

<sup>44</sup> Cecilia had been baptized in Trinity Church by Dr. Moore.

<sup>45</sup> She, too, like her sister, had been baptized by Dr. Moore at Trinity Church.

<sup>46</sup> M<sup>SGR.</sup> SETON, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> Of the exactitude of the priests in recording baptisms, and even the supplying of baptismal ceremonies, we have evidences in the old Baptismal Registers which have been published. Suffice it to mention here the *List of Baptisms registered at St. Joseph's Church, Philadelphia*, printed in the *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, Vol. i, pp. 246 and foll. No record seems to have been kept in Baptismal Registers of cases like that of Mrs. Seton, where there was not even the supplying of ceremonies; nor indeed was it the place for such entries: if they were made anywhere, it should be rather in the *Liber Status Animarum*. An investigation in that direction might repay the trouble.

verus, when, after mentioning the 14th of March, she adds: "and *the next day* was admitted to the true Church of Jesus Christ"?

Were we to follow Msgr. Seton's text, no difficulty would be in the way, for he simply leaves out the troubling words: "the next day." But these words are in the original of Mrs. Seton's letter, and the difficulty arising from them is not solved by wantonly amputating them against all rules of historical criticism. An explanation, then, must be found, for these words must have a meaning. Now if we advert to the statement of the *Journal*, that on the 14th of March, 1805, Mrs. Seton made *profession of faith*, and to the wording of the inscription written on the copy of A Kempis given to Antonio Fillicchi, that, on that day, he *presented* her to the Church, it may well be that, when she speaks of her being admitted to the true Church on March 15, she refers to the absolution of the censures which follows the profession of faith and was postponed until the morrow. There is certainly no more insuperable objection to this postponement than there could be to the delay of conditional baptism, if conditional baptism there must be as Dr. White intimates.

Let it be borne in mind, however, that the conclusion here advocated—namely, that neither Mrs. Seton nor her children and her sister-in-law received conditional baptism on their entrance in the Catholic Church—cannot be given the note of absolute certitude. Dr. White's hypothesis still remains possible; for, after all, the clergy of St. Peter may not have been in the habit of registering conditional baptisms of converts, or even if they were, may, absolutely speaking, have been remiss in this part of their duty in this particular case. As a matter of fact, and not to go much outside of Mrs. Seton's circle, when Mr. S. Cooper was received in the Church by Father M. Hurley, O.S.A., in the fall of 1807, in St. Augustine's church, Philadelphia, no record was entered in the Baptismal Register at the time; nevertheless, a few years later, in order to enable Mr. Cooper to receive Orders, Father Hurley drew up a certificate attesting the fact of the convert's baptism at the time of his reception into the Church.<sup>48</sup>

Still these considerations affect in no way the status of the question in regard to Mrs. Seton, for Father Hurley may have entertained, touching the protestant baptism of Mr. Cooper, doubts which the protestant baptism of Mrs. Seton did not legitimate; each case is to be judged on its own merits and dealt with accordingly. On the whole, then, the probability against Mrs. Seton's baptism at St. Peter's remains extremely great and bordering on certitude, whereas the probability of her being baptized is hardly more than a mere possibility.

By way of conclusion, let us sketch briefly in correct chronological order the events of these few weeks of Mrs. Seton's life.

The year 1805 began for her in the same spiritual darkness and misery in which she had groped during the last few months. On Sunday, December 17, "in desperation of heart," she had gone to St. George's Episcopal church; but, "being much more troubled than ever," she had, on returning home, "determined to go no more to the Protestants." Epiphany Day, therefore, she spent at home, "alone with God," she says, "in so singular a manner as to take the desperate resolution to remain till the moment of death of no religion at all, since I could not find out the right one. With what ardor and firmness I would stretch out arms to Him and cry, I will hold to you in life and death, and hope and trust to the last breath. Then . . . dusting a volume of our Bourdaloue, I opened the very festival and on the words: O you, who have lost the star of faith! Then the torrents of distress and anguish overwhelming again. To see a Catholic priest, O it was the only supreme

<sup>48</sup> This certificate is in the Archives of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia.



desire on earth." Once more she resolved, after heartily committing her cause to God, again to read these books, on the Catholic faith which had first won her towards it, and in consequence would, she hoped, with a helping hand from above, lead her to it; and then it was she "tried so many ways" to have an interview with Father O'Brien. Unable to meet the priest, she penned a letter to Bishop Carroll, "but his silence to Mr. Anthony's letter makes me hesitate to send mine," she remarks.

Meanwhile, her friends made use of every argument to dissuade her from becoming a Catholic. "Now they tell me," she writes to Amabilia on February 15, "to take care, that I am a mother, and must answer for my children at the judgment seat, whatever faith I lead them to . . . . That being so, I will go peaceably and firmly to the Catholic Church. For if faith is so important to our salvation, I will seek it where the true faith first began, will seek it among those who received it from God himself." "I will go peaceably and firmly . . . ." The day was drawing near, but it had not yet come. Neither her fervent prayers nor her penances so long persevered in dispelled the doubts. Finding no help near, she determined (February 19) to seek the advice of Father Cheverus, of whom Antonio Filicchi had written so highly in his letters from Boston. Before the learned and zealous missionary was able to answer, Antonio Filicchi had returned to New York and communicated to his still hesitating friend Bishop Carroll's long-delayed reply (January 13) to his letter sent from Boston on October 4. Mrs. Seton should beseech our Lord "to fortify her soul in the resolution of following unreservedly the voice of God speaking to her heart, however difficult and painful the sacrifice may be which it requires." This letter, it seems, was the ray from heaven which dispelled all her hesitations. On Ash Wednesday, February 27, she went to St. Peter's and prepared for her reception in the Church. Cheverus' answer, dated March 4, and received some days later, could but encourage her in the course she had entered upon; and indeed, "with a mind grateful and satisfied as that of a poor shipwrecked mariner on being restored to his home," she made, on the 14th of March, her profession of faith at the hands of Rev. Mathew O'Brien and in presence of Antonio Filicchi.

Anxious to leave, on commencing a new existence, no page of her past life unscrutinized, five days she prepared for her general confession, which was made on March 20, with what sentiments of faith and appreciation of the Sacrament the *Journal* reveals. Five more days of intensely fervent preparation, and the blessed hour came when, in her soul's exstasis, she could write:

At last, Amabilia, at last, God is mine and I am His. Now let all earthly things go as they will. *I have received Him . . . .*

CHARLES L. SOUVAY, C. M., D.D.,  
*Kenrick Seminary,*  
*St. Louis, Mo.*